

A HANDFUL OF VERSES

Novels by Victor Bridges

THE RED LODGE

GREENSEA ISLAND

MR. LYNDON AT LIBERTY

THE MAN FROM NOWHERE

THE LADY FROM LONG ACRE

THE CRUISE OF THE SCANDAL

A HANDFUL OF VERSES

BY
VICTOR BRIDGES

MILLS & BOON, LIMITED
49 RUPERT STREET
LONDON, W.

Published November 1924

*Printed in Great Britain by Ebenezer Baylis & Son, Ltd., The Trinity Press,
Worcester.*

DEDICATION
TO
MARGARET

MY songs had lost their music,
The world was old and grey,
You came like a gleam of sunshine
At the close of a winter day.

My heart leaped up to meet you,
My songs again rang true,
The world was alight with beauty,
And my soul was alight with you.

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GLOUCESTER BORN

DEEP in our inmost hearts,
Where the secret places lie,
In a shrine of gold our memories hold
A vision of earth and sky.
Some spot where our footsteps used to stray
In the careless days of yore,
And it's sick with longing I sometimes feel
For the distant Severn shore.

Bristol and Gloucester lads
Were ever a roving breed,
And if Fortune fails in filling their sails,
It's little they care or heed.
They smile in their hearts, though far adrift
In a world that's strange and wide,
For I know they dream of the Severn stream
And the wind on the Cotswold side.

WHEN GOD MADE YOU

WHEN God made you,
From out the wondering skies
He stole the moonlight for your matchless eyes;
'Twas very dark that evening, Sweet and True,
When God made you.

When God made you,
To fashion your dear breast
Of rose and pearl the dawn was dispossessed;
'Twas very grey that morning, Sweet and True,
When God made you.

A DREAM

I STOOD beside my couch, and saw my soul,
Radiant, unfettered, beautiful, and bright,
Rise from the flesh, and softly steal away
Into the lonely silence of the night.

One glance it cast upon the senseless clay,
In those impassioned eyes I saw the gleam
Of bitter hatred, and Divine regret,
And cold with fear I woke from out my dream.

THE STARS

THE stars once shone on a world in pain,
Cold with the light of a far disdain,
The scornful light of a faith untried,
The splendid scorn of a sinless pride.

But ever the helpless years roll by,
And wisdom comes as the ages die,
And now from the velvet depths of night
The stars look down with a softer light.

THE RIDDLE

THE story of withered ages
Is written in blood and tears,
The stain runs through to the pages
That wait for the younger years.

And sometimes I sit and wonder,
When we come to the final part,
Shall we find it a foolish blunder,
Or merely a work of art?

TO L.V.J.

IN a world that is weary and tainted,
Toil squalor and sorrow among,
Can you fancy no picture unpainted?
Can you picture no poem unsung?

Yet it may be that some time or other,
Across the dread river of pain,
We shall change this dark world for another,
We shall live, we shall labour again.

We shall die unconfessed and unshriven,
Unhonoured, unwept we shall go,
Yet it may be the solos of Heaven
Will be sung by the silent below.

1915

THERE was ten of us in that bit o' trench,
When the Strafers found the spot,
And a blue partik'ler brand of 'Ell
Was the 'ow d'ye do we got.

'E's a mean-souled skunk is the Kaiser Bill,
If 'alf of it's true they tells,
But no one can say as he stints 'isself
When it comes to bungin' shells.

'E give it us good, an' there we was
Unable to shift or 'ide,
And out o' the ten there was only three
'As hadn't *some* lead inside.

An' just as the fun was at it's 'ight,
Through the noise and the dust and the stench
I see'd a bloke with a cross on 'is arm
Come crawlin' along the trench.

'E looks around with a smile on 'is face
As it cheered you up to see,
" I don't think much of the 'Orspital,
But we'll do our best," says 'e.

An' from orf of the Kaiser's 'andiwork
'E wipes the blood and the dirt,
An' 'e fastens us up as best 'e could
With strips of an army shirt.

Per'aps as the finest doctorin' goes,
'Twere a little bit ready and rough,
But if *you'd* been bloomin' well bleedin' to death,
You'd 'ave thought it was good enough.

And all o' the time the screechin' shells
Was smashin' and bustin' fine,
An' just as 'e'd finished 'is final job
They done it—the German swine!—

A shrapnel bullet, bang through the 'eart,
An' 'e gives a little sob,
An' 'e just sits back with a smile, as though
'E was pleased 'e'd finished 'is job.

If I lives to the end of this rotten war
(Which I greatly doubts the same),
I'll always remember that Red Cross bloke,
Though I'm damned if I 'eard 'is name!

DARTMOOR

ROCKY tors and hills of heather,
Through all change of Time and weather
Dartmoor lifts her ragged crest,
Guardian of the golden West.

Dartmoor stands, while all around her
Mortals die and fortunes founder,
Brave and old and grey and wise
Underneath the Devon skies.

BELINDA

WHEN Belinda writes to me,
She gets a pen and paper fair,
Spreads her dainty elbows out,
Sighs and wriggles in her chair :
Just her tangled curls you see
When Belinda writes to me.

“ dady dear,” the letter runs,
“ we luvs you orful both of us,
Mothers drest the onvelup ”

Then

Belinda Written thus.

Fate is kind, you *must* agree,
When Belinda writes to me.

TO MY GRANDMOTHER

IT hangs upon my study wall,
Above the bust of Walter Scott,
The picture of my grandmama,
Who died when I was just a tot,
Of all the things with which I'm blest
I think I love my Granny best.

Now those who read my verse may deem
The likeness of her vanished face
With reverent thoughts inspires my soul,
And yet I fear that's not the case,
For in my picture Granny's seen
At three months short of seventeen.

She lived in that Victorian age,
Which nowadays we're apt to scorn,
When Madame Tussaud ruled the roost,
And cinemas were yet unborn;
When Sabbath breaking seemed a sin,
And no one tried to "listen-in."

She spent her time bereft of all
The joys that modern maidens like,
She never perched herself upon
The pillion of a motor-bike.
At "gaspers" she declined to look,
She neither jazzed nor shimmy shook.

"A deadly life!" I hear them cry,
Our new emancipated girls.
They may be right, and yet I think
If one may judge by sunny curls,
By smiling lips, and eyes aglow,
That Granny didn't find it slow!

NEW YEAR'S EVE 1922

AT times like these it seems to please
The unobservant mind
To think that with the passing year
Its woes are left behind,
But more observant men like us
Will probably agree
That what was true of '22
Applies to '23.

My garden plot, a pleasant spot
When Summer gilds the land,
Will rapidly be filled again
By Nature's lavish hand.
Whatever flowers may fail to bloom
It's certain as can be
The weeds that grew in '22
Will grow in '23.

Some afternoon in early June
With envy I shall weep
When papers give the facts about
The great Calcutta Sweep.
Whoever gets the winning horse
I know it won't be me;
The blank I drew in '22
I'll draw in '23.

Our brave M.P. has writ to me
His promises profuse
That Government extravagance
He'll certainly reduce;
And yet I somehow feel convinced,
Despite his powerful plea,
That what they blew in '22
They'll blow in '23.

Though on my mind such thoughts unkind
In sombre numbers crowd,
My head, as Mr. Henley says,
"Is bloody but unbowed."
There's just one bright consoling thought
Which fills my heart with glee—
The beer they brew in '22
I'll drink in '23.

FROM THE FRENCH

AN idle, useless, dreaming scamp,
With neither brains nor gold,
I'll tread my way from day to day,
Until the tale be told:

Until the sand has trickled through,
The stream of life run dry,
Then like the millions gone before,
I'll lay me down to die.

It will not be in joy or grief,
In hope or in despair,
But unafraid I'll face the shade
That looms unlighted there.

With steady hand I'll raise the cup,
And with my latest breath
Drain one contented draught to life,
And fling the dregs at death.

SATIS

I'VE a little house at Hampstead
Where I mean to live and die,
Up amongst the pines and brambles
On the road towards the sky,
While far below—South, East, and West—
Whichever way I gaze,
The spires and roofs of London Town
Come tumbling through the haze.

I've a little house at Hampstead,
I've a wife I dearly love,
I've the rolling Heath around me
And the broad blue sky above;
And if through Death's uncharted sea
We win to land again,
I greatly hope that Paradise
Is like the Spaniards' Lane.